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A Capitalist's Report from Hanoi

In October, 1958, when I previously enjoyed the privilege of appearing before this distinguished organization, the United States was maintaining a mere handful of military advisers in South Vietnam. During the ensuing eleven years, our military forces there have built up to more than half a million men, 40,000 of whom have been killed in combat. The death and destruction that we have wrought in North and South Vietnam have won us the censure of most of the nations of the world, democratic and communist alike, and the end is not yet in sight.

I am a capitalist whose career has spanned almost all of the years of this century. None of the wars waged in my long lifetime has measurably advanced the welfare of humanity. Since the first nuclear chain reaction was produced at the University of Chicago in 1942, and the first atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, every military encounter has had to be considered as the spark that might set off the nuclear holocaust to wipe out mankind and all of his works.

On that earlier occasion here, I reported on my first visit to the Soviet Union, and expressed my conclusion that the nations of the world should strive for a workable modus vivendi, regardless of differences in economics or philosophy. My thesis was, and still is, that capitalism and communism should meet each other half way. The idea was considered

controversial then, and regrettably small progress has been made toward its wide acceptance in the interim.

The United States government instead has staked the future of the nation on the containment of communism, and given expression to this goal in mounting military budgets over the years and in a costly and catastrophic expeditionary venture in Vietnam. On the basis of the information our government has been giving us all along, we neither know how to win the war nor end it.

I am a believer in seeing for myself whenever possible. For this reason, I lost no time in packing up and going to Hanoi when officially invited to do so in November. I am impelled to add that I have not been among those favored with a similar invitation to visit Saigon.

My first introduction to the North Vietnamese took place in Paris as the preliminary peace talks were beginning in 1968. I saw the Hanoi representatives there and in Moscow on two other occasions before my visit to North Vietnam. I also met with the National Liberation Front representatives both in Paris and Moscow.

In an effort to become as fully informed as possible, and to seek a broad spectrum of viewpoints, I have also consulted with many of the ambassadors and military attachés from France, India, Burma, Canada, Poland, England and the Soviet Union to Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam. Their consensus is that we are waging a war we cannot win and that the sooner we end it, the less painful and expensive it will be.

All of these diplomats have had wide experience in Asia, and I am indebted to them for a better understanding of the problems there.

I was cordially received in Hanoi and was able to go wherever I wanted to and to meet anyone I designated, in the government or out. Hanoi, with a population of approximately 600,000, is a neat, medium-size city, laid out and built under the direction of the French. The people are industrious and polite.

During my week in Hanoi, I spent most of the time in discussions with government leaders and others influential in shaping policy and opinion. I shall not burden you with a catalogue of my sight-seeing, but I would be remiss ~~not~~ to mention a tour of the Museum of the Revolution. Housed there are quantities of equipment and material used in the revolutionary war that broke out in 1946 and ended with the departure of the French, after their defeat at Dienbienphu in 1954. Eighty percent of the arms used by the French were made in America. The Museum also contains a large collection of pictures, prominent among them a pose of then Vice President Nixon with a French general, taken when he visited Hanoi in November of 1953 to urge the French on to greater activity against the Vietnamese nationalists.

We make a mistake in forgetting the history of Vietnam. The entire country was under French colonial domination for three hundred years until France's misfortunes in World War II. Vietnam was occupied by

Japan from 1940 until her surrender to the Allies in 1945, and the Vietnamese nationalists began their struggle for independence in 1941. While the name of the late Ho Chi Minh has become a household word around the world, it is well to remember that the present Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, has not only held that post since 1955, but was active in the Nationalist leadership from its beginnings. The nationalists took with the utmost seriousness President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Atlantic Charter of 1941, with its promise of self-determination and freedom for all colonial peoples all over the world.

In 1946 Ho and the French signed an agreement recognizing Vietnam as a "free state within the French union," but hostilities began and, in 1948, the French set up and proclaimed a new government for Vietnam in Saigon. After the French defeat in 1954, the Geneva agreement provided for the temporary division of Vietnam into two parts pending elections that were to be held no later than July, 1956, and that were to lead to reunification. The present Prime Minister conducted the Geneva negotiations on behalf of North Vietnam.

The United States and the Saigon government refrained from signing the Geneva agreement, and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles saw to it that the promised election was never held. President Eisenhower later disclosed that Dulles' decision was based on the realization that 80% of the South Vietnamese would vote to join the North under Ho's leadership if

given the opportunity. In 1955 the United States sent its first military advisers to train the South Vietnamese Army. To Eisenhower's credit, it can at least be said that he flatly refused to send American combat troops to Vietnam, although he did permit generous support of Saigon with money and equipment. Escalation of advisers and then of combat forces occurred under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, as we know all too well and to our infinite sorrow.

From my observations and discussions, I feel that I know what the thinking is in Hanoi. Nationalism is the overriding and overwhelming desire. The government is communist, as is half of the world, but the passion for independence comes first. North Vietnam numbers both the Soviet Union and mainland China among its allies, yet would no more welcome domination from either of those two countries than they did from the French. Because of broken promises since the end of World War II, Hanoi is exceedingly wary of the United States.

North Vietnam is in a mood to end the war, but not to lose it. In my judgment, acceptable terms would be (1) an announcement by President Nixon of the withdrawal of 100,000 American troops in 60 days and removal of all remaining American troops, support as well as combat, within 18 months and (2) the formation of a representative coalition government in South Vietnam under the control of neither the United States nor North Vietnam.

We may overlook the fact, but the Vietnamese do not, that the Thieu-Ky-Khiem triumvirate now reigning in Saigon with our support is composed of three generals who fought on the side of the French. We also may welcome so-called "Vietnamization" of the war as reducing our own numbers and therefore casualties there, but this is the Nixon administration's plan to continue the war, not end it. When the American public realizes that this plan means removal of our ground combat troops only, and continuation of more than 200,000 air, sea and ground logistical forces for at least several years to come, the protest is bound to build up even stronger than it did against President Johnson.

All along our military position in Vietnam has been precarious at best. It was folly in the first place for even the richest country in the world to send an army 9,000 miles from Washington to fight in the subtropics. Tiny and poor as our North Vietnamese adversary may be, the determined little nation has all along had the massive support of two giant allies. With one of them, China, which has the largest standing army in the world, North Vietnam shares 600 miles of common frontier. The other, the Soviet Union, which is pledged by treaty to defend North Vietnam, possesses what is regarded as the best equipped and most modern army in the world. Both are nuclear powers, even as we are.

From a fiscal standpoint, we are in increasing trouble. The defense budget for the year ending June 30, 1970, is close to \$80 billion, which

amounts to a massive 40% of our colossal total budget of \$200 billion. Approximately \$25 billion of the \$80 billion for defense goes directly into Vietnam, while much of the remainder is applied to the production of weapons that would lead to the destruction of the human race if ever used. We are plagued by inflation, shortage of credit, soaring interest rates and slumping Dow-Jones averages. If this continues much longer, there will be a businessman's revolt.

By the Constitution, Congress controls the purse and determines how much of the estimates submitted by the Executive to fund. The tendency in recent years has been for Congress to write a blank check for defense, without knowing precisely what our foreign policies are or exactly who is making them. Congress and you gentlemen are in a better position than I am to ascertain whether the policy-making is being performed by the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon or the CIA, as well as what the actual plans are.

One thing that Congress does know, as it makes appropriations, is that we have Vietnam-style commitments to 43 foreign countries. If we are obliged to live up to all of them, we could find ourselves in 43 wars at one time, even though we are going broke on just the one in Vietnam. Another fact of which Congress is keenly and acutely aware is that all of the House and one third of the Senate are up for election in a little more than nine months. The Nixon administration, you can be equally sure, is

vitaly interested in the election of Republican Senators and Congressmen in November.

How then can our President, Commander-in-Chief and head of the Republican Party extricate us from Vietnam cleanly and completely? I have taken the position all along that Mr. Nixon is an astute politician, who can be counted on to recognize the profound unhappiness in America over this hopeless war. Surely a technical and constitutional way can be found to get rid of the Saigon government, for which we found a technical and constitutional basis to install, to start with.

The burning question is, of course, can we get out of Vietnam, bag and baggage, "with honor," which translates into "without losing face." The obvious recent parallel is the French departure from Algeria. There, after long years of guerilla warfare and futile negotiation, General deGaulle in 1962 finally had the courage to end it overnight, for once and all. This involved the quick evacuation, not only of half a million soldiers, but also a million civilians, many of them of third-generation French descent. This was accomplished with far greater aplomb than the flight of the United Empire Loyalists at the time of our own American Revolution and the confiscation of all of their property.

The final question is, does our Commander-in-Chief have the courage to make the crucial decision? In business, the accepted practice is to get all of the facts, preferably at first hand, evaluate them carefully and then

act accordingly. Negotiations may or may not be initiated and conducted by subordinates, but successful conclusion and consummation of major transactions are best accomplished by face-to-face meetings between those who possess the powers of decision-making. I cannot state it categorically, but I have a strong hunch that the Prime Minister of North Vietnam would meet with the Commander-in-Chief of the United States if the Commander-in-Chief wants such a meeting.